Pure Gifts for Future Benefit?

Giving Form to the Subject in a Biodiversity Databasing Project in India

Moe Nakazora
Kyoto University / JSPS

Bioprospecting is a new name for an old practice; it refers to the scientific investigation of plants and traditional knowledge in the hope of discovering clues for developing new drugs. In the late 1980s, the revival of bioprospecting raised issues about intellectual property rights for indigenous people, leading to subsequent efforts by the governments of resource nations to create databases of 'valuable' indigenous knowledge and register its 'original owners'. This paper will examine one such attempt by a state government in India and discuss how subjects (property-holders) as well as objects (indigenous knowledge) may be temporally given form by—rather than having existed prior to—the various documentation practices in the project. The discussion focuses on how the anthropological theory of gift relations is *partially* mobilized through the medium of documents, and claims the need for a new critical ethnography that does not rely on distance between informants and anthropologists (Riles 2001).

'Nature' and 'Property-holder' as Emergent Entities

In the late 1980s, many life-science corporations showed renewed interest in natural resources and indigenous knowledge in the hope for finding leads for developing new drugs. Since then, there has been greater interest in the intellectual property rights of indigenous people and farmers. The 1992 UN Convention of Biological

Diversity (CBD) mandated that drug companies accessing indigenous resources and knowledge must share with the source nations and communities any economic benefits that accrue. Although it is in many ways a fragile mandate, the CBD's idiom and institutional framework have had noteworthy effects on the practice of the parties involved. In line with the tenets of the CBD, approval of bioprospecting by scientists has required benefit-sharing agreements with the resource owners and, as a consequence, numerous nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and indigenous activists aiming to prevent illegitimate exchange have emerged.

Scholars of critical legal studies (Boyle 1997), international politics (Ryan 1998), and applied anthropology (Greaves 1994) have published numerous studies regarding the issues of indigenous intellectual property rights and illegitimate exchange. Despite their differing disciplinary backgrounds, these scholars share similar assumptions about indigenous knowledge and its rightful ownership: knowledge has discrete and identifiable subjects who have 'rights' to knowledge, which is itself regarded as a fixed and corporeal object. These scholars seem to assume the existence of a 'bounded community' where people, plants, and knowledge are bundled together.

Several anthropological studies have criticized the scholars' underlying assumption, arguing that indigenous knowledge is informed by general knowledge, which lacks defined spatial and temporal boundaries—it is shared so widely and freely that we cannot identify *a priori* the original communities that labored to produce it (Brown 1998; Brush 1999).

Cori Hayden (2003) went beyond this quotidian anthropological critique. She argued that indigenous knowledge as a property of discrete communities is not a self-evident fact; rather, it results from the activities involved in obtaining collective consent. One important question that she formulated was about how subjects (property-holders) and objects (indigenous knowledge) are considered within the framework of a benefit-sharing agreement between bioprospecting scientists and their local interlocutors. She especially highlighted the creative reengineering of the common benefit-sharing model, whereby her informant scientists bought plants in urban markets (rather than obtaining them in communities who supposedly shared plants/knowledge) and negotiated benefit-sharing with interested organizations, such as a group of traditional healers who wanted to start an ethnobotanical garden. By describing this benefit-sharing strategy, Hayden explored how subjects and objects *temporally emerge—are made visible or are given values,* in Marilyn Strathern's terminology (Strathern 2004)[1]—in the

[1] As I pointed out elsewhere (Nakazora 2009), Hayden follows Strathern in focusing on the emergent nature of subjects and objects in specific relations.

bioprospecting process, disputing the assumed existence of 'original owners' who labored to produce—and therefore have an inherent right to—'the knowledge'. In other words, this approach recognizes 'indigenous knowledge' and 'property-holders' not as a *representation* of nature or human interests but as *emergent entities* within various practices.

Documents and 'Collectives': Indian National Biodiversity Act

About ten years after Hayden conducted her fieldwork in Mexico[2], a new movement had emerged for considering the fundamental question that she set up. Recently, state actors of resource nations have launched documentation and digitalization projects to catalogue 'valuable' indigenous knowledge. In India, in the late 1990s, the government and NGOs succeeded in overturning several patents granted by the European Union (EU) patent office and the United States (US) patent office for neem, turmeric, and basmati rice, which were recognized as having originated in India. Since the revocation of granted patents involves huge costs and takes time, to give patent examiners improved access to background information (prior art) of Indian traditional knowledge, it was thought prudent to make a database of traditional knowledge that would make it easier to spot misappropriation during the initial phases of patent examinations (Saxena, Roy & Tripathi 2002: 340–3).

According to the Indian National Biodiversity Act (2002), national legislation enacted in line with the CBD, in India, the 'traditional knowledge' to be databased includes codified (documented) as well as uncodified (not documented but may be orally transmitted) information, the assumption being that the knowledge-holders for each category are different, namely, Ayurvedic doctors[3] and traditional folk healers (*vaidya*). Although this distinction is an arbitrary construction of postcolonial history[4] and the boundary between the two is often

[2] Hayden conducted her research in Mexico from 1996-97 (Hayden 2003: xiv).

[3] Here, 'Ayurvedic doctors' means graduates of a bachelor course in Ayurvedic Medicine and Surgery (BAMS), an integrated degree in which students receive education in Ayurveda as well as in modern medicine; we call folk traditional healers *vaidya*s.

[4] Around the turn of the twentieth century, prominent Ayurvedic practitioners established professional associations, colleges, and pharmaceutical firms and wrote textbooks organized according to a modern medical division of subjects. Inspired by the thought of British Orientalists, they had revivalist ideology, calling for 'a return to the 'scientific' Ayurveda of the classical age' through the adoption of institutional practices of biomedicine, while lamenting the descent of Ayurveda into magical practices during the colonial era. In the 1920s, this revivalist reform expanded, and received official support from the Indian National Congress that regarded Ayurveda as a manifestation of Indian culture. Over time, the gap between 'professional' Ayurveda and a host of indigenous practices with which it had once been closely associated has been widened and essentialized into the gap between the professional and folk sectors (a newly separated category) of Indian medicine (Brass 1972; Leslie 1992).

eroded in daily practices,[5] the Act specified that the central government is responsible for the databasing already documented knowledge and state governments for recording/collecting/eliciting and databasing oral knowledge. Although the central government's project, called the Traditional Knowledge Digital Library (TKDL), had a limited purpose, that is, negative protection (prevention of misappropriation of 'Indian' knowledge), the state-level project, called the People's Biodiversity Register, included appropriate access and future benefit-sharing in its scope. Consequently, to ensure future legitimate exchanges, the local projects emphasized the need for registration of not only knowledge but also its 'original owners' and 'their intentions for benefit-sharing' (Brahmi, Dua & Dhillon 2004; Saxena et al. 2002).

As is obvious, this new effort at databasing clearly aims at different end product than previous bioprospecting projects. Rather than producing pharmaceutical products, the actual intention is to create various documents regarding plants, knowledge, and people.[6] At the same time, however, the project incorporated some basic ideas from the CBD, for example, a notion of who the 'true' knowledge holders are, in effect, the nation and the 'community'. Here, while inheriting from the CBD the assumption that holders of indigenous knowledge must be collectives rather than individuals, the Indian Biodiversity Act extended the notion of community to include both spatially bounded[7] and other communities, such as professional organizations of traditional healers (*vaidya*).

Hayden claimed that this assumption of 'community (collectives)'[8] reflects the ethical concern of policy makers in an era of radically transforming concerns in biomedical justice regarding 'how to include people in research' (Hayden 2007: 740). On the one hand, there has been a long-prevailing biomedical consensus that research is fundamentally for the good of humanity and that participation should be rendered as an act of gift-giving or donation rather than secured by undue inducement, that is, luring people to participate in research by offering direct returns for their involvement (cf. Merz et al. 2002). On the other hand, as we have seen, a

[5] Jean Langford (1999) has observed that the more educated (institutional) Ayurvedic practitioners have sought legitimacy by imitating European medicine, and the more folk practitioners have sought legitimacy by imitating professional Ayurveda. Related to this, Langford (2003) has also argued how some healers of 'folk medicine' claimed to have learned their knowledge as much from the print media as from local *guru*s.

[6] This move is called an 'informational turn in biodiversity', reflecting the move of recent scientific practice in which a database (information stored) is increasingly seen as an end of scientific enterprise in itself (Bowker 2000, 643).

[7] *Gram pañchāyat*, a local self-governing institution at the village or small town level in India, is recognized as a 'key actor' in the People's Biodiversity Register (National Biodiversity Authority 2008).

[8] Bronwyn Parry (2005) pointed out that the notion of 'consenting community (collectives)' is now traveling from the world of bioprospecting to the field of clinical and genetic research.

new discourse of benefit-sharing, proposing greater equity between those who exploit nature, genetic information and traditional knowledge for profit, and those whose knowledge or resources are exploited has recently emerged.

According to Hayden, the coexistence of the twofold set of ethical discourses, that is, unethical inducement and ethical benefit-sharing, has led to the policy assumption that although nature and genetic information are no longer regarded as free gifts, the value yielded should not go directly to the domain of the market or commodity exchange between self-interested individuals. In other words, 'in efforts to re-authorize bioscience participation as an act that exceeds the gift but that cannot proceed directly to market, benefit-sharing proposals in this domain, too need something like "community"' which, in effect, comprises 'groups grounding a kind of exchange that remains in between' (Hayden 2007: 746). Hayden further related this to Marcel Mauss's work in the early twentieth century, claiming that 'we are not in the "old" terrain of gift versus commodity, but in something else, which we might have to call "not-gift versus not-commodity"' (Hayden 2007: 747).

Cutting Collectives: People's Biodiversity Registry in Uttarakhand

How do groups (communities) emerge in the actual implementation of these projects? Let me focus on the Uttarakhand state government's People's Biodiversity Register (PBR) project, where the assumption of a collective subject was problematized. As is often the case with many other development projects that call for community consultation or participatory development, PBR projects often consult anthropologists who specialize in the local culture.[9] In addition, the recognition that 'anthropologists have long been engaged in codification of traditional knowledge'[10] seems to make them particularly eligible for employment in PBR projects.

Created on November 9, 2000, Uttarakhand is the 27th state of India. Located in the northwestern Himalayas, the environment is rich in important medicinal and aromatic plants, prompting the state government to take steps to develop the new state as an 'Herbal State (*jaḍi-būtī pra-deś*)'. Drawing on extensive effort by the state government to attract international and national donors for herbal plant projects, various plans have been formulated to protect medicinal plants and to aid farmers with support for the commercial cultivation, processing, and

[9] As David Mosse (2004) pointed out, in many cases, anthropologists are employed not only to include local people but also as a means of quality assurance for donors.

[10] Quoted from the unpublished report (draft for discussion) by Gene Campaign entitled 'A review of the documentation of the Indigenous Knowledge (IK) associated with biodiversity in South Asia'.

marketing of medicinal plants (Alam, de Kop & Steenhuusen 2006; Mishra 2003; Singh, Srivastava & Khanduri 2005).[11] The People's Biodiversity Register is regarded as part of this Herbal State policy in Uttarakhand.

The project was officially initiated in 2010 with the formation of the State Biodiversity Board, which consisted of a chair (the head of the forest department), five official members from several state government departments, and five specialist members elected from nodal research institutes and NGOs in the herbal sector. Before PBR implementation, an NGO (*Sambandh*[12]) was given the role of conducting a PBR pilot project that included a consulting anthropologist (Sharma[13]).

From the beginning of the pilot project, the notion of collectives as legitimate knowledge-holders caused trouble for the members of *Sambandh*. Dr. Negi, the chairperson of *Sambandh*, stated at the first meeting, 'Uttarakhand has been lack of strong community.' This remark gives voice to a frustration felt by many of the intellectuals and practitioners active in Herbal State policy (cf. Alam et al. 2006; HRDI 2008). They hold that the rugged topography of mountains and numerous small valleys and other geographic conditions of Uttarkhand, along with continuous economic migration since the 1960s, owing to the lack of financial resources within the state, is responsible for weak community bonds.[14] Furthermore, as Dr. Negi also emphasized at the meeting, unlike in several other states in southern India, where, Ayurveda and medical tourism have recently become a main source of state revenue, and where various occupational groups have come to standardize treatments provided by *vaidya*s [traditional healers], in Uttarakhand there is no professional organization that brings together the *vaidya*s.

Holding such a negative opinion, how did the project team gather a group of *vaidya*s for the project? Naithani, a project coordinator for *Sambandh,* explained the method for identifying *vaidya*s as follows:

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[11] Several research and development institutions such as the Herbal Research Development Institute (HRDI) were newly established or revalued with financial assistance from the national agency (National Medicinal Plant Board: NMPB): they have conducted projects to encourage farmers to participate in cultivation by solving technical and marketing problems through public-private collaborations mostly funded by international aid agencies.

[12] Pseudonym

[13] All names are pseudonyms, unless otherwise noted.

[14] There is also a counter-discourse among state intellectuals, who claim that Uttarakhand is famous for its 'strong community', represented by the existence of *van* (forest) *pañchāyat* (in the former princely state Kumaon) and the widespread *Chipko* movement. This discourse was not, however, mobilized in the PBR and other projects in the 'Herbal State' policy. It seems that the project members' assertion that Uttarakhand lacks strong community reflects difficulties that the members have experienced in mobilizing collective participation in herbal projects. Rather than Uttarakhand lacking strong communities, it may be more the case that medicinal plants do not strongly motivate local Uttarakhand communities.

> We have to rely on the networks or experiences of the project board members. For example, our NGO organized a cultivation project of medicinal plants in Chamoli last year, and in some cases we happened to know those who approached us for their own benefits or those who had superior knowledge of medicinal plants among participants were *vaidya*s![15]

Here, we can clearly see that the presence of collective subjects constituting Uttarakhand *vaidya*s were not an essential precondition for the project. Rather, they were temporally assembled through the contingent networks of the project participants, and through the medium of medicinal plants. Regarding this subject-making process, we should pay attention to two things. First, the category 'Uttarakhand *vaidya*s' includes a variety of subjects ranging from hereditary *vaidya*s (*jāti*) to those who gained knowledge of medicinal plants through interaction with *sādhū* (wandering Hindi renunciates).[16] Second, the project members were content to regard those who actively participated in other herbal projects as *vaidya*s. To be recognized, that is made visible as a *vaidya*, it was only necessary to have explicitly shown interest in and knowledge of medicinal plants. Those who did not demonstrate interest or knowledge did not qualify. This goes against the UN-espoused principles of intellectual property, which asserts that traditional healers (as discrete subjects) are owners of their knowledge.

> Sharma, the anthropologist on the project team, explained this Uttarakhand model of knowledge-holders in the first report she submitted to the central government as follows:
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> In Uttarakhand, knowledge of *vaidya*s is regarded as property of 'individuals' rather than 'community'. It seems they have sheer interests and strong incentives in medicinal plants.[17]

In this explanation, we can recognize that the moral underpinning of the original community model regarding benefit-sharing, that is, 'not-gift versus not-commodity' becomes slippery. Rather, the *interests* of individuals are emphasized.

Unexpected Responses from *Vaidya*s

Then, during the course of the project, how is this assumption that *vaidya*s in Uttarakhand are individualized maintained or challenged? Below, I report a pilot

[15] Quoted from my field notes (November 5, 2009)
[16] In my field research, it has become clear that the knowledge of many of the *vaidya*s in this region is a bricolage pieced together from reading Ayurvedic texts published at the beginning of the twentieth century, fortuitous contact with travellers with herbal knowledge (*sādhū*), and other sources.
[17] Quoted from the unpublished report for 'Minutes of the State Biodiversity Board Interactive and Review Meeting', organized by the National Biodiversity Board on April 28–29, 2010 (cf. NBA 2010).

project team interview of *vaidya*s, ostensibly to elicit opinions on the appropriation of their knowledge and on how benefits should be shared.

On October 30, 2010, based on a questionnaire, 32 *vaidyas* were interviewed at the local *Sambandh* office in Pipalkoti, Chamoli.[18] At the desk, three male local *Sambandh* staff members sat as interviewers facing a group of *vaidya*s. Sharma and I sat on the side as observers. The interviewers were young technicians who were not familiar with the issue of intellectual property rights and sometimes made mistakes in translating the questions from English into Garhwali and Hindi.[19] For example, one translated the original question 'without any hesitation, will you be able to provide your knowledge?' to 'without any hesitation, can you leave your home (for further training for medicinal plants)?' From this particular mistake, it is obvious that the local *Sambandh* staff do not value *vaidya*s' knowledge as much as the project board members do. They seemed to regard their work as a 'normal survey' and concentrated on 'just filling in the forms properly and finishing up the work in due time.'[20]

Although Sharma (and I) kept quiet during the interview, because of her concern for the 'people's initiative' and because she had to submit a periodic report on the project the next day, she recorded the following episode, in which the unanticipated responses of the *vaidya*s struck her:

Interviewer 1: What kind of benefit (*phāyadā*) do you want in return for sharing your knowledge? Please choose from these options. No. 1…

Old female *vaidya*: What?

Interviewer 2: Auntie, you are helping someone for his research with your knowledge. He would like to return you something. So, tell me what you want.

Old female v*aidya*: It is our duty (*kartavya*) to help you. As much as we can, we try to help people.

Middle-aged male *vaidya*: Are you from the government? Is it a survey?

Interviewer 1: Yes, we are from the government, but it is not survey; it is research, I mean, for a study.

[18] I do not have permission to publish the original questionnaire. It contains questions pertaining to *vaidya* acceptance of the academic/commercial application of *vaidya* knowledge, who should be rewarded if this knowledge is utilized for academic and commercial purposes, and what kind of benefit should be gained. Respondents are expected to select single answers from multiple choice options on the form.

[19] The interviewers used Garhwali and Hindi.

[20] Quoted from my field notes (October 30, 2009)

Old female *vaidya*: It is nice to help people, who are doing a study for the nation (*bhārat ke liye*). Also, we have to show special kindness to the guest from a foreign country.

Interviewer 2: By the way, what kind of help do you want from the government?

Old female *vaidya*: It would be great help for us if they had mercy (*dayā*) to organize cultivation projects of medicinal plants.

(After repeating this type of conversation with other *vaidya*s several times, the interviewers changed the question from 'what kind of benefits do you want in return for sharing your knowledge?' to 'what kind of mercy do you want from the government?')[21]

Here, we can recognize that while there was no answer when the interviewers asked the *vaidya*s what they wanted in return for sharing their knowledge, when they were asked what kind of help or mercy they wanted from the government, they were willing to answer 'cultivation projects'.

Interests Cloaked as Generosity

On the way back from the interview, Sharma and I were talking about the report that she had to submit to the central government by the next day. As a translator of local intentions, Sharma was required to mould her observations during the interview to the project template. After several rewritings, eventually she successfully fit this episode into the 'Feedback, new finding' column as follows:

> Hilly people in Uttarakhand are shy and always hesitate to demand. Also good *karma* is important for them. Usually in Garhwal villages, there often seen the situation (sic) in which the *vaidya*s do not accept any payments (sic) for their treatment, though they receive things like vegetables and milks (sic) or other forms of kindness from villagers as gifts *after some time*. This delay of returns is to certify that they, both *vaidya*s and other villagers, helped people without expecting any returns. Not like market economy, here in Garhwal villages, people intentionally keep some time to receive the gifts after their good deed. Therefore, to fully respect the local sensitivity, benefit-sharing should take the form of generosity, which will be evoking *vaidya*s' participation in knowledge sharing.[22] [emphasis on '*after some time*' in original]

[21] Quoted from my field notes (October 30, 2010)
[22] Quoted from the unpublished report for 'Minutes of the State Biodiversity Board Interactive and Review Meeting', organized by the National Biodiversity Board on November 15 and 16, 2010. It was originally written in English, but the emphasis in italics is mine.

This formation by Sharma—that is, *vaidya*s' concealing their intent to reciprocate for their knowledge sharing by strategically delaying reciprocation—can be related to Bourdieu's interpretation of Mauss's essay on the gift. Mauss defined gifts as having a 'voluntary character, so to speak, apparently free and without cost, and *yet* constrained and interested' (Mauss 1966: 2–3). Bourdieu, in his ethnographic study of Kabyle of Algeria (Bourdieu 1977), pragmatically interpreted Mauss's theory to emphasize the pretense of generosity. Often, Bourdieu noted, all that makes gift exchange different from simple barter is the lapse of time between the gift and the counter-gift. This delay makes it possible to pretend that each is simply an act of generosity, of denying any element of self-interested calculation. This sort of subterfuge, he suggests, is typical of traditional societies, which, unlike ours, do not recognize an explicit field of economic activity. As David Graeber rightly argued, this argument is undeniably formalist, seeing exchanges as essentially dyadic transactions between self-interested individuals (Graeber 2001: 28).

Many anthropologists have pointed out that this formalist understanding of Mauss has prevailed since Malinowski's *Crime and Custom in Savage Society* (1926),[23] so, in this sense, Sharma's recommendation was basically in line with conventional anthropological thought.

Alternative Theory of Gift Relations: *Dānadharma*

In the doctoral thesis she submitted to Garhwal University, however, Sharma relied heavily on another way of analyzing gift relations. Recently, several anthropological studies have claimed that the widespread Malinowskian reading of Mauss is one-sided and distorts Mauss's original intention, especially when focusing on gift giving in India (Graeber 2001; Laidlaw 2000; Parry 1986). Indeed, when analyzing forest rituals in the Garhwal Himalayas in her thesis, *Hindu Rituals in the Mountainous Areas in Northern Uttar Pradesh*, Sharma was influenced by these arguments, which I will review below.

According to Jonathan Parry (1986), Mauss writes of prestations as having a 'voluntary character, so to speak, apparently free and without cost, *and yet* constrained and interested…They are endowed nearly always with the form of a present, of a gift generously offered *even when* there is at bottom, obligation and economic interest'. In the particular part of Cunnison's translation of *The Gift*,

[23] See for example Leach's criticism of Levi-Strauss's thesis (1961), Blau's discussion of exchange and power (1964), and Weiner's criticisms of Sahlins (1976).

however, which Parry picked up as an example of Malinowkian reading, what is voluntary 'and yet constrained and interested' becomes a disinterested *theory* contradicted by an interested *practice*, 'economic interest' becomes 'economic *self*-interest', and 'even when' the gesture of generosity is only a fiction is turned into an assertion that 'it *is* only a fiction' (Parry 1986: 456). Regarding this sort of distortion, which can be seen in Bourdieu's work, Graeber (2001: 29) noted that, on some level, what Bourdieu is saying is undeniably true. There is no area of human life, anywhere, where one cannot find self-interested calculation. But neither is there anywhere one cannot find kindness or adherence to idealistic principles: the point is why one, and not the other, is posed as 'objective' reality.

Related to Graeber's attempt to redress the balance, several accounts of gift giving in India shed light on the domain of pure or unreciprocated giving, which had been largely neglected in anthropology. According to these scholars, there is a Hindu concept which views the gift as a kind of sacrifice, an act that wholly eliminates the donor's proprietary rights (Parry 1986: 461). For example, Parry (1986) and Raheja (1988) dealt with the gifts called *dan*,[24] which send away inauspiciousness from the donor to the recipient, who may be a Brahman, Barber, Sweeper, or a wife-taking affine, and who, by taking the correct ritual precautions, attempts to digest the misfortune. James Laidlaw (2000) described various rules governing Jain alms-giving as an institutionalized attempt to deny the obligations that arise from receiving gifts, such as prohibition of expressing pleasure for the food offered or speaking of placing (instead of giving) something in a bowl.

Deepa Reddy, while analyzing a story similar to the one that attracted Sharma's attention in the interview, invoked the Indian notion of the 'pure gift' (Reddy 2007). The NIH-NIGRI community consultation project in an Indian community in Houston, for which Reddy worked as a consultant, along with requests for blood donations for genomic research, aiming to avoid accusations of biopiracy, also asked about the meaning of the donation. Contrary to scientists' assumptions, however, the Indian donors' attitude was notably apolitical—they themselves legitimized blood donation as a form of community service (*sevā*), or something done for 'the good of humanity', 'the greater good,' and, even more generally, 'a good cause'. Although Reddy pointed out that the blood donation would bring concrete monetary and nonmonetary benefits to the community, she did not jump to conclusions that the donors' true interests were disguised by words expressing generosity and volunteerism. Rather, citing Parry (1986), she regarded the rhetoric of service as a contemporary corollary of the idea of *dāna*, though its

[24] *Dan* constitutes the most important feature of many rituals and festivals, being given almost daily, and utilizing enormous material resources in the villages where they lived (Parry 1986: 460).

usage is not group specific but far more general and decontextualized. She further focused on remarks acknowledging the alienation of the blood gift from the donor: comments such as, 'We are giving to you, the rest is your responsibility'. And, 'Still, someone will eventually benefit'.

Another Possibility

Reddy's work shows us another possibility for theorizing the case of the People's Biodiversity Register project, and this possibility seems to be much simpler than the application of Bourdieu's theory if we take the *vaidya*'s words literally. When I was inside the network of the project, 'following the scientists', however, I did not think of that possibility at all. It was only after I visited the village of Bemuru by myself to see Raghuveer Negi, one of the most prominent *vaidya*s in the region, that I started to see that the document of the project is not a *representation* of subjects and their interests but a *temporal form* given to them. The following episode is from my field notes:

> During my stay in Bemuru for a month, I always felt the warm hospitality of Raghuveer Singh and his family, and other villagers. Whenever I tried to return something for their kindness, they refused to receive my gifts by saying, 'This is just our nature', and 'To give you *sevā* is for our pleasure (*apne khuś ke liye*)'. When I asked Raghuveer Singh about benefit-sharing for his knowledge, he quietly said, 'As I told your friend before, nothing, I want. *Why are you telling us all about what you have not found here?*'[25]

My first encounter with these works on Indian pure gift giving was actually through Sharma's doctoral thesis, which she submitted to Garhwal University. Relying on Raheja (1985) and Parry (1986), she analyzed the local variety of *dāna* expressed in various forest rituals in Garhwali villages. As she wrote in the preface to her thesis, and similarly responded whenever I thanked her for helping me, 'We, Indians, are here in this world to help others and we also believe if we are doing well, good things and vibrations will come to us not from you but from God.' As we have seen, this type of argument was not mobilized in the project. Here, the question that Graeber evoked, 'why one, and not the other, is posed as 'objective' reality' is for me, less a theoretical question than an empirical one[26]: to understand one anthropologist's practice within the project.

[25] Field notes: December 30, 2010

[26] The purpose of this paper is not to claim the correct interpretation of Mauss' thinking about gift relations—actually, his ultimate point was that the gift is a *combination* of interest and disinterest, of freedom and constraint, which acts as a way of creating social relations—but to describe the project work that incorporated some part of it.

Knowledge Practices and Network Inside out

Let's look back at the situation in which Sharma prepared her report. Sharma, the local interviewers, and I were all caught up in the pressure to submit a document the next day in a given form, the form that affected future benefit-sharing. As Annelise Riles has argued, in bureaucratic work, 'time' and 'the use of formality', rather than underlying power relations or politics, forecloses the possibility of an appeal to something outside: this prevents endless reflexivity and discussion (Riles 2006: 82). In the People's Biodiversity Register project, Sharma was required to be reflexive to be able to fill in the 'feedback, new finding' column but only as long as that reflexivity did not interfere with project procedures. In other words, any new finding should not contradict the assumption that benefit-sharing is to be conducted: it is possible, however, to propose *how* it should be conducted. In addition, since a project once started, should not go back to the previous stage, the assumption that there are individualized *vaidya*s who have (economic) interests in medicinal plants should be maintained. Once these determinants have been considered, rather than as being informed by *dāna*, it seems natural that the *vaidya*s' unexpected apolitical attitudes were interpreted by a formalist understanding of self-interest, a correlative to the benefit-sharing model of the overall policy and the Uttarakhand PBR project model of the subject.

In this short essay, I have attempted to examine how subjects and objects were temporally assembled through—rather than prior to—various documentation practices in a recent biodiversity databasing project in India. While I maintain that there is a role for anthropological theory in the process, my emphasis has been on how, as it becomes entangled in the formality of the project and its documentation procedures, anthropological theory is only partially mobilized.

Finally, I would like to draw attention to the fact that my observation was not from an outside vantage point or detached from the network of the project. Although I was not given a formal position in the project other than assisting Sharma (being free, in Sharma's words, from the duty of document work), I was a part of the facts or data that the project team dealt with, as obvious from the *vaidya*'s remark that 'we have to show special kindness to the guest from a foreign country'. In addition, for example, the episode I collected in the village of Bemuru was further incorporated into the project through Sharma. Consequently, the relationship between my knowledge practice and that of my informants is complicated—the network of which I am a part is regarded as data when documenting *vaidya* opinions on appropriate benefit-sharing, as well as such project work (the process of documentation) that I consider my ethnographic research subject. In addition, Sharma's interests and mine were intermingled rather than independent from each

other, since we noted the same episode at the interview and analyzed it with anthropological theories of gift relations: while inside the network of the project, I did not doubt the legitimacy of a formalist understanding of the *vaidya*'s interests.

As ethnographers have moved their field sites to so-called modern society, the knowledge practices of ethnographers and that of informants has become more and more entangled. This new ethnographic condition requires a new style of ethnography, because the 'once productive distance ethnographers maintained, implicitly or explicitly, purposefully or not, between ourselves and our objects of our study, between the things studied (the data) and the frames we used to study them (the analysis)'[27] cannot be taken for granted anymore (Riles 2006: 3) What we should explore from now on is the possibility of 'ethnography not of analysis but of response' (Strathern 2004), that is, ethnography that relies not on a clear distinction between ethnographic data and analysis but on parallel description of anthropologists' and informants' knowledge making, specifically focusing on documents as artifacts of modern knowledge practices and the concepts that travel between anthropologists' and informants' domains of knowledge practices.

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[27] Annelise Riles (2001) called this condition the 'collapse of distance', but as this paper suggests, rather than collapsed, the distance between anthropologists' and informants' knowledge practices is more dynamic—sometimes attached but other times detached.

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